

The Memorial of Our Lady of Loreto recalls the mystery of the Incarnation. Since the Middle Ages, the faithful have venerated the Holy House of Loreto. According to legend, this house in a town in Italy is the house which Mary was born in in the Holy Land and lived in until she was married and went to live in a new home with Joseph. As such, this would have been the home where the Angel Gabriel visited to ask Mary if she would be the Mother of God (Ordo). We are eternally grateful for her faith filled response, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

In the third century, Christians transformed her simple home in Nazareth into a place of worship. They built a synagogue-style church around the house that Mary had lived in. History tells us that a 7th century bishop documented his travel to Nazareth where the church was still a place of pilgrimage as Christians came to venerate the house where the Annunciation took place.ⁱ

All of this begs the question, how did a house built in Nazareth wind up in the Italian city of Loreto? Let us begin by analogy of something that happened in more recent memory. In the early 1960s engineers in England made a very troubling discovery. London Bridge was falling down. Built in the latter half of the 19th century, it was ill suited to heavy traffic. With the weight of many cars traversing over it, the old bridge was slowly sinking into the Thames River at the rate of 1 inch every 8 years. Renovation seemed impractical since a newer more car friendly bridge could be built from scratch. A city councilor in London thought that someone in America might be interested in it. He pitched the idea and an enterprising American businessman bit on the hook. Robert McCulloch bought the bridge, had it dismantled stone by stone, and rebuilt it in the Arizona desert. He had recently purchased thousands of acres of land near Lake Havasu and wanted something that would attract people to come out to the desert and invest in a new community. The London bridge was ideal for his needs.ⁱⁱ

The threat in the Holy Land was desecration by non-Christians. In the 13th century, the Angeli family rescued “Our Lady’s House” from Muslim invaders by transporting the home, or at least a fair number of the stones, from the original site in Nazareth to Italy for the building of a shrine. Angeli translates from either Greek or Latin to “angels” in English. In 1900, the pope’s physician discovered documents in the Vatican archives that verified this ancient story. Furthermore, “excavations in both Nazareth and Loreto found similar materials at both sites. The stones that make up the lower part of the walls of the Holy House in Loreto appear to have been finished with a technique particular to ... Palestine. There are (also) inscriptions in ... Greek ... and Hebrew letters that read “O Jesus Christ, Son of God,” written in the same style inscribed in the Grotto in Nazareth.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“Since the 14th century, pilgrims have journeyed to the Holy House of Loreto to stand inside the walls where tradition holds the Virgin Mary was born, raised, and greeted by the Angel Gabriel.”^{iv} And just last year, Pope Francis added this memorial to the church calendar in order to call humanity to renewed holiness by following the path of Mary in unflinching devotion to Jesus. During these difficult times when our own travel is limited, let us ask for the Virgin Mother’s help in restoring our world to health by invoking a small portion of the Litany of Loreto.^v

Holy Mary,	Pray for us.
Holy Mother of God,	Pray for us.
Holy Virgin of Virgins,	Pray for us.
Mother of Christ,	Pray for us.
Mother of the Church,	Pray for us.
Mother of Divine Grace,	Pray for us.

Mother most pure,
Ark of the Covenant,
Gate of Heaven,
Morning star,
Health of the Sick,
Refuge of sinners,
Comforter of the afflicted,
Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God,

Pray for us.
That we may be made worthy
of the promises of Christ.

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/did-angels-really-carry-the-holy-house-of-mary-to-loreto-italy-25088

ⁱⁱ history.com/news/how-london-bridge-ended-up-in-arizona

ⁱⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/did-angels-really-carry-the-holy-house-of-mary-to-loreto-italy-25088

^{iv} Ibid.

^v ewtn.com/catholicism/devotions/litany-of-loreto-246